DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 400 845 IR 056 160

AUTHOR Yitzhaki, Moshe; Richter, Nava
TITLE Immigrants and Immigration in Israeli Children's Literature.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 7p.; In: Sustaining the Vision. Selected Papers from the Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (24th, Worcester, England, July 17-21, 1995); see IR 056 149.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); *Childrens Literature; *Content Analysis; Foreign Countries; *Immigrants; *Immigration; *Literature Reviews; *Social Attitudes; Social Discrimination; Social History; Stereotypes; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Israel

ABSTRACT

Millions of people have immigrated to Israel throughout the 1900s and before. Immigration waves are considered the most important social, political, and economical turning points in the history of Israel. This study analyzes the content of Israeli children's books dealing with immigrants and immigration to determine the image of immigrants and immigration, the realism of the image, and the attitudes of children's book authors toward this subject. More than 30 Hebrew children's books with immigrant problems as the central theme were analyzed. Approximately one-half the books were published during the 1980s, more than one-third (n=11) in the 1990s and 16% (n=5) in the 1970s. Three books described purely positive, idealistic attitudes on the part of the settled population. The study concluded that: (1) the children described in the books immigrated to Israel from different countries around the world; (2) the negative attitude toward immigrants characterized almost all periods of immigration to Israel; (3) ambivalent feelings toward immigrants; (4) all books included the message that negative attitudes toward immigrants stem from biases and prejudice, and are wrong; and (5) immigrants who remained steadfast and struggled against the environment and conditions finally overcame the obstacles and were successfully absorbed into the new country. (Contains 21 references.) (Author/SWC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 400 845

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Immigrants and Immigration in Israeli Children's Literature

by
Moshe Yitzhaki and Nava Richter
Department of Information and Library Studies
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel

Introduction

Israel is known as a typical immigration country, to which millions of people, mainly Jews, have immigrated throughout the last one hundred thirty years. The various problems encountered by immigrants in a new country, regardless of its geographical location, have been documented in detail by sociologists and anthropologists as well as by writers of novels and children's books. Inevitable, there are considerable social, economical, cultural, and sometimes religious differences between the immigrants and veteran residents, and much of the new-comer's resources are devoted to overcoming these difficulties. However, despite its importance, apparently this topic has not been thoroughly treated by scholars of children's literature, using the method of content analysis.

Background

Admittedly, a negative attitude towards new-comers is probably a natural human reaction, especially if the latter differ in color, culture, customs and life habits. The incoming stranger is perceived as a threat to the existing society, its cohesion, values and hierarchy. When these differences couple with fears of competition over jobs, housing etc., the negative attitude, intensifies, and may lead to alienation, derision, rejection, and sometimes even to aggression and violence (17). However, in the special case of Israel certain unique factors were supposed to counter these natural human emotions. Many Israelis view the last century's immigration to the Holy Land not merely as a migration of people, but as the fulfillment of an ancient ***biblical*** prophecy, a crucial step towards the ultimate redemption. Thus, the successful absorption of immigrants in the Holy Land is also considered a religious duty. Moreover, besieged and surrounded for almost half a century by hostile and belligerent states with more than twenty- fold population, the existing population regard every new-comer as strengthening the national security, especially if possessing high academic or professional knowledge.

The immigration waves, like the wars, are considered the most important social, political and economical turning points in the history of Israel, becoming milestones in the collective memory. The biggest waves came during the first decade following statehood, when an existing population of six hundred thousand had to absorb **one million immigrants**, seven hundred thousand of which came within only four years. Immigrants absorption often involved economical, sociological and psychological problems, resulting of mentality and culture gaps, and the tensions between veterans and new-comers' entered Israeli folklore, and sometimes lead to friction, alienation and social polarization. (12)

Historians have detected such frictions as early as the end of the 19th century, continuing onward with each new immigration wave, including the so-called "fifth wave" of German Jews, escaping Nazi Germany in the 1930s. They were accused of segregation, arrogance, and reluctance to adapt the new Hebrew culture, provoking a similar reaction from the existing East-European-originated population. The huge immigrants waves following statehood exposed the discrepancy between the official government policy which considered immigration the most important national task, and the indifference of most people. Ben-Gurion himself later complained that this unparalleled immigration was accompanied by a big failure although everybody sincerely favored the "Ingathering of the Exiles", only few exhibited brotherhood towards the new-comers. In the course of the mass immigration those responsible for their absorption developed negative stereotypes and a patronizing attitude, considering the new-comers inferior in culture and otherwise, and urgently needing to discard their former tradition and customs, and adapt the surrounding culture. Ignoring immigrants different sociological and cultural background, the absorbers decided to determine their new value system and to reeducate them. The worst

IR056160

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ken Haycock
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

psychological problem for immigrants from Moslem countries was the disintegration of the traditional patriarchal-family framework, and the confrontation with modern competitive reality. (14)

Literature Review

Previous studies have investigated the question what are the images of certain minorities or sectors of society, as reflected in children's literature. Thus, several studies explored the image of the American Indians (1) and Mexican Americans (3) in American children's literature, others probed Negro stereotypes (10) and the reflections of Jewish culture. (5) Still others studied the reflected images of women, girls, fathers, sexism and sexual bias (19-20) as well as moral and ethical values. (13) Little attention has been directed to the **image of the immigrant**. Anderson (2) published a guide for librarians and teachers which list over 700 fiction books dealing with immigrants in the United States. Other books aim to serve the multicultural approach and are designed as handbooks for teachers or as a collection of resources for literature to be used in various school grades.

The few studies in Hebrew usually deal either with one or a few stories only. Zehavi (21) discussed differences between Israeli-born and immigrant children characters in the 1920's and 1930's as reflected in two then-published books.

Analyzing three short immigrant stories by Nurit Zarhi, Stein (18) pointed out that they reflect the new 1960's norms, which unlike those of the 1950's, emphasize the aesthetic function of literature, presenting an ambiguous plot, and an individualist hero who is preoccupied with his own personal world, struggling with universal existential problems.

Hovav analyzed a book by Yael Roseman (8) and another one by Herzelia Raz (9) and Hadas (7) discussed the image of the absorbers as reflected mainly in the same books.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine and analyze the content of **Israel** children's books dealing with immigrants and immigration and published in **different** periods since statehood, in order to determine the image of immigrants and immigration reflected in these books, and the realism of that image, thus revealing attitudes of children's books authors towards these topics, over a lengthy period of time.

Methodology

A survey of Hebrew children's literature in public and school libraries found more than thirty books, mostly published during the last twenty five years, in which immigrant problems were the central theme. The content and plots of these books were analyzed to enable comparison of the various descriptions regarding immigrant expectations, veterans' attitudes towards him, his reaction and the end of the plot.

Findings and Discussion

About one-half of these books were published during the 1980s, more than one-third (11) - in the 1990s and 16% (5) - in the 1970s. Since the books were taken from active libraries, in which old and worn books are discarded, the sample likely is biased towards newer books, and the proportion of such books published before 1980 may be higher. The fact that more than one-third were published during the recent half decade of the 1990s also testifies that immigration absorption is still a hot topic among authors of children's books.

While the following conclusions relate to all, or most, books studied due to space constraints, the examples and citations are limited, to a few representing books only, each written in a different year and describing different situations.

Only three books describe purely positive attitudes on the part of the settled-population (i.e. veterans), with no mention or hint of any negative emotions. Apparently, these books paint an idealistic picture, expressing wishes of their authors, depicting reality as they wanted it to be. The vast majority of the books (28), however, describe negative attitudes of the existing population towards the new-comers, such as: condescension, disrespect, contempt, arrogance, suspicion, social hostility, stigmatic outlook, prideful segregation, degradation, humiliation, etc. In fact, many veterans were sincerely willing to help the immigrants and ease their difficult process of

absorption in a new country. However, they were also convinced they knew best what was good for the new-comers, and thus wanted them to change and to adopt the local culture and customs, strange and alien as they might seem.

Sami Michael's book *Tin Huts and Dreams* exemplifies many of these attitudes and their effect on the immigrants children. Shimon lives with his parents, immigrants from Iraq, in the "maabara", a temporary settlement of tents and tin-huts, dozens of which were hastily erected all over the country, during the aforementioned years (1948-51) of mass immigration. (12) Its inhabitants complain: "They have thrown us into tents and tin-huts full with mice and cockroaches and say this is the Promised Land..." Seeing his mother digging futilely with a defective pick-axe, Shimon recalls with yearning and nostalgia past days when his wealthy family celebrated holydays in joy and comfort. "You are crazy" he screams at her, but she turns to him and quietly says: "If I sit all day in the tin-hut I'll go crazy. Your father is also afraid he'll go crazy. He is only fifty and already too old to be given a job. So he sits in the cafe, having no money to pay even for a cup of tea. What should I do?"

A Chicken for Atonement, written by Eli Amir, indicates that these traumatic experiences were not limited to immigrants living in cities and towns, but happened also to youngsters who were taken in the early 1950s from the "maabara" to get a "better" education in a Kibbutz. Culturally, the children were very different. The Kibbutz members did not conceal their contempt for the children's oriental celebration and the latter reacted by stubbornly clinging to each other and to their traditional customs. The kids themselves felt torn between two different and conflicting worlds: they had lost much of the connection to their family traditions and culture but still did not feel part of the local culture, like the kibbutz-born children. As in Michael's book, Nuri feels that the immigrants from Moslem countries are scorned by the "sabras" (native-Israelis), who consider them primitive and lacking culture. Thus, naturally, the kibbutz members feel superior, and try to reeducate the new-comers, and mould them to conform to kibbutz norms and become real kibbutzniks like themselves. (16)

Most books stress the stigmas and prejudices of the veterans towards the new-comers, being a frequent cause of friction and tension. When Shimon, Sami Michael's book hero, offers his service as a porter to a woman, she eyes him suspiciously and says: "You are from the "maabara, aren't you?", because for here maabara dwellers were merely a rabble of uncivilized refugees, of which one should beware. An old man hit the sidewalk with his cane, saying: "Somebody should teach them to behave like humans:, and "immediately two decent guys appeared, who politely rushed to save the poor woman from the insulting hoodlum. One of them grabbed Shimon's hands from behind and the other clutched his neck, asking the woman: "what did this bastard do to you?". The woman was not mean and she pitied the innocent boy, but being so upset he was unable to talk. Later, Shimon encounters a similar attitude when he returns a stolen carpet (not by him) and overhears a woman saying: "They have ruined the whole neighborhood ... thieves ... criminals ... nothing can be left outside unattended..." Her son disagrees with his mothers prejudice, but she does not listen to him. In fact, most stories include some positive veterans, who favor the immigrants, befriend them, and try to convince others that the new-comers are decent people and deserve better treatment.

Another scene illustrates the hurting suspicion and contempt towards the new-comers. Daabul, Shimon's friend, declares: "I'm going to leave your Israel!" "You are an idiot," says Shimon. "Yes, I'm really an idiot," laughed Daabul bitterly. "This morning I suddenly felt an urge to go into a bookstore and browse. The store-owner blocked the entrance with his arms, asking in a threatening tone what I want. I saw from his look that he was sure I had never held a book in my hands. So, I purposely told him in **English** that I wanted an **English** book for my horse here and left angrily."

Shimon tries to calm his friend: "It makes me angry too, but some day they will realize that we are not a bunch of noughts."

"Don't you understand," said Daabul, "They don't want us here ... and we are tired. Do you know why? Everywhere I have to convince people that I'm no cheater, no idler, no idiot, and this is the most difficult thing to do, to convince idiots that you are not an idio.t"

Even the government official responsible for the maabara is plagued with these biases: "Sergeant," he says to the policeman, "you are new here and are not familiar with people here. They do not lie purposely, but they are like children, naive and ignorant. They have wild

imagination, unable to distinguish between truth and fantasy."

Another common motive book is the feeling of shame and humiliation of parents and specially children, because of the steep decline in the father's job status of the father in the new land. The father held a dignified profession, and was widely respected, but here he was reduced to menial labor, which he never imagined before. Teachers too conveyed the message that such parents are a source of shame, resulting in a significant weakening of parental authority, which enabled external negative elements to drag youngsters into the world of crime and delinquency, a known sociological problem.

The painful and negative experiences encountered by the immigrants naturally lead to great disappointment. They harbored high expectations, of coming to the promised homeland, but eventually realized that they have to live a long time in a temporary maabara, in poor physical conditions, in tents and tin- huts.

Understandably, aimed at children as target-population, most books ana-lyzed do not elaborate parents' jobs, their feelings, sufferings and problems, but rather detail the emotional problems and sufferings of **children** in adjusting to a new country and society. Rather, most books emphasize the deep disappointment of the children following the cold and unfriendly welcome of their classmates. Expectedly, they respond by longing for their former country, where they enjoyed respect, status, friends, and wealth, although they know returning is not a realistic option. Consequently, some sank into despair, regretting their coming to the land. Dudik, the boy immigrating from Romania in 1950 in *To Be Like Everyone*, by Moshe Granot and Marusia, the girl arriving from Russia in the 1980s in *Marusia, Marusia*, by Ze'ev Vardi despair in a moment of weakness and resign themselves to the current situation and to remaining outsiders forever.

Most books describe the educational staff as combating against the alienation and negative attitudes, at school and outside. Many plots include a similar scene: the principal and/or teacher enters the classroom, tells the pupils about the new-comer and asks them to be nice to him and help him. This description is a realistic one, but admittedly there was probably a considerable discrepancy between the educational-national messages transmitted by leaders and educators, concerning the importance of immigration to the country, and the daily encounter of the veteran population and the new-comer. (17) In most plots the children, or at least some of them, did not comply, but rather mock and laugh at the new pupil and disclude him from their games. Nuri, in Eli Amir's book, says: "You, veterans, have built the country for us. We love you and admire what you have done here, but I must tell you... that in one thing you have failed, your **children** don't know how to welcome new- comers. They patronize, degrade and insult. Interestingly, many authors chose to set the plot in a kibbutz, where in reality many immigrant youth groups were sent by the authorities for a combined program of education and work. The reasoning was that the process of acculturation and reeducation would be easier in an egalitarian society, whose members are educated and highly motivated, as far as national missions are concerned. The kibbutz society was thus chosen as a melting-pot, which would mould the young immigrants into the desired model of the new Israeli. (16) This was somewhat successful, but too often at the expense of abandoning generations- long traditions, customs and family ties.

At first glance it is a bit surprising to realize from these stories, rooted in reality, that the negative attitude towards immigrants prevailed not only among city and town children, but also among kibbutz ones, whose education emphasized equality, brotherhood and friendship, and whose members were considered, from certain aspects as the country elite, holding high positions. The explanation is probably that a child is a child, whether in a town or in a kibbutz, and the feelings of superiority, emanating from their parents, contributed too.

Similar complaints, not unrealistic, could be referred also against non-kibbutz children, whether in rural settlement (moshav) or in town. The "moshav" children in Granot's book do not accept Dudik, the young immigrant from Romania, to their group and he suffers social segregation. Likewise, the "moshav" children in Yitzhak Noy's book *The Hill of Black Irises* object to the North-African immigrants building their homes in the adjacent hill, because the lively irises will disappear... In fact, some of the adults at this moshav also look down at the new-comers, claiming they are dirty, primitive and lazy.

Many studies and media reports confirmed difficulties of adjustment and feelings of alienation and isolation prevailing among immigrants' children. A recent study found that about

two-thirds manifested signs of distress, typical to cultural shock following immigration. They spoke about longing for their former country, complaining about social segregation and reduced efforts in school. Indeed, some of the obstacles confronting these children in the educational system are almost inevitable. The need to learn a new language, the cultural shock and the painful process of adjustment of the whole family adversely affect successful integration at school. Such a child, unable to understand and follow classroom lessons, is ashamed to talk and becomes an ignored object in class. Succeeding in such circumstances, requires not only talent, but also a strong will power and much willingness to invest in learning, and ultimately many do succeed. (11)

In most books the plot reaches a stereotypical happy ending when eventually, sometimes following a certain event which breaks the barriers between the new-comer and his classmates, they apologize for being so nasty and accept her or him as an equal peer. Marusia, in Vardi's book *Marusia, Marusia*, differs from her brother, Volodia, who easily adjusted to the surrounding due to his almost complete command of Hebrew and his outstanding ability in playing football, thus immediately becoming everyone's friend. Marusia's period of adjustment was long and painful. Only the friendship with Dina from the very first day, helps her overcome the teasing of some classmates, although others are friendly. More than once she returns from school angry and desperate, declaring she would never go back to that awful class. The turning point comes one morning when a shy black-skinned Ethiopian boy is introduced by the teacher to the class and nobody volunteers to sit next to him, except Marusia, who becomes his main tutor and helper. Marusia's position in her class greatly improves from then on, most of her classmates become real friends, and one day the whole class goes enthusiastically to the airport to welcome a large group of Russian immigrants. Similarly, Michael's book ends with the mother saying proudly: "All gates have been opened," and Nuri, in Amir's book gratefully hears Dulek, the kibbutznik, complementing the group of immigrant boys who came to learn and work in the kibbutz.

Conclusions

1. The children described in these books immigrated to Israel from different countries around the globe: the United States, Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Iraq, North-Africa, Ethiopia and Argentina. Assuming that most authors describe true personal experiences, testifying to events they or others in their proximity have undergone, (15) one may conclude that the common view attributing the negative attitudes to the afro- Asian origin and hence different color of the immigrants, is not entirely correct, since also western and East-European originated immigrants encountered similar negative attitudes, probably due to the differences in culture, customs and mentality.
2. The negative attitude towards immigrants was not limited to any specific period but characterized almost all periods of immigration to Israel, even the British Mandate period, long before the establishment of the Jewish State.
3. A content analysis suggests that in daily reality all these factors interact, and it was not easy to practice in reality the officially-preached positive attitude towards the immigrants. Hence the ambivalent feelings prevailing in life and described truthfully in the literature. This conflict between ideology and actual feelings is expressed in the common saying: "Israelis like immigration, but like the immigrants less...".
4. It is worth noting that all books analyzed in the present study include an educational message, sometimes implicit, that the negative attitudes towards immigrants stem from biases and prejudice, and are wrong, immoral, unfair and unjustified. Each individual should be treated only according to his deeds and behavior, rather than his color of origin.
5. Those immigrants who remained steadfast, struggling bravely against the unpleasant environment and conditions, finally overcame the obstacles and were successfully absorbed in the new country.

References

1. Abel, M. B. "American Indian Life as Portrayed in Children's Literature", *Elementary English*, 50 (1973) 202-208.
2. Anderson, V. *Immigrants in the United States in Fiction: A Guide to 705 Books for Librarians and Teachers, K-9* Jefferson (NC), McFarland, 1994.

3. Blatt, G. T. "Mexican-Americans in Children's Literature", *Elementary English*, 45 (1968) 446-451.
4. Cohen, S. "Minority Stereotypes in Children's Literature: The Bobbsey Twins, 1904-1968". *Educational Forum*, 34 (1969) 119- 125.
5. Daniels, L. "34th Man: How Well is Jewish Minority Culture Represented in Children's Fiction?", *School Library Journal*, 17 (1970) 38-43.
6. Gast, D. K. "Minority Americans in Children's Literature", *Elementary English*, 44 (1976) 12-23.
7. Hadas, Y. "The Absorbers of Immigration as Reflected in Children's Literature", *Sifrut Yeladim ve-Noar*, 17 (1) (Sep. 1990) 21-26 (In Hebrew).
8. Hovav, L. "The Funny Girl with the Ear-rings", *Sifrut Yeladim ve-Noar*, 17 (1) (Sep. 1990) 4-13, 26 (In Hebrew).
9. Hovav, L. "This Persians and this Russians, More on Immigration and Ingathering on the Exiles", *Sifrut Yeladim ve- Noar*, 17 (4) (June 1991) 35-39 (In Hebrew).
10. Jones, J. P. "Negro Stereotypes in Children's Literature. The Case of Nancy Drew", *Journal of Negro Education*, 40 (1971) 121-125.
11. Landers, I. "Pupils on Paper", *Devar ha-Shavua*, 11/95 (17 March 1995) (In Hebrew).
12. Lisak, M. "The Immigrations", *Encyclopedia Hebraica*, vol. 6 (2): *State of Israel*, 1993, 399-413. (In Hebrew).
13. Lowry, H. W. "A Content Analysis: Middle-Class Moral and Ethical Values in the Newbery Books", *English Record*, 18 (Apr. 1968).
14. Naor, M. and Giladi, D. *The Land of Israel in the 20th Century; 1900-1950*. Tel-Aviv, Ministry of Defense, 1990. (In Hebrew).
15. Orgad, D. "'The Adara Oath' and 'Friendship in Ordeal' from the Viewpoint of the Author", *Sifrut Yeladim ve-Noar*, 17 (1) (Sep. 1990) 14-16 (In Hebrew).
16. Raz, H. "On the Topic of Immigration Absorption", *Sifrut Yeladim ve-Noar*, 17 (1) (Sep. 1990) 48-51 (In Hebrew).
17. Regev, M. "Society Against the Stranger and the New-Comer", *Sifrut Yeladim ve-Noar*, 17 (2) (Dec. 1990) 21-25 (In Hebrew).
18. Stein, D. "Nurit Zarhi-Creating New Norms in Children's Literature, Ways of Dealing with Problems of Absorption in Three of her Stories", *Sifrut Yeladim ve-Noar*, 15 (3-4) (May 1989) 88-95 (In Hebrew).
19. Stewig, J. W. and Higgs, M. "Girls Grow up to be Mommies", *School Library Journal*, 19 (1973) 44-49.
20. Tate, J. M. "Sexual Bias in Science Fiction for Children", *Elementary English*, 50 (1973) 1061-1064.
21. Zehavi, A. "'Sabras' and Immigrants in the 1920's and 1930's in Two Books", *Sifrut Yeladim ve-Noar*, 17 (1) (Sep. 1990) 17- 20 (In Hebrew).